The Graham 2035 Comprehensive Plan

A Time of Opportunity

ADOPTED September 1, 2015

GRAHAM
NORTH CAROLINA

2035
Comprehensive Pla

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE 1

Introduction 2
Our Vision 5

PART II: KEY ISSUES 6

Issue 1: Building upon our Community Character 7
Issue 2: Bringing Business to Graham 9
Issue 3: Accessing Local and Regional Opportunities 13
Issue 4: Enhancing our Public Facilities and Services 17
Issue 5: Expanding our Housing Options 20
Issue 6: Conserving our Natural Environment 22

PART III: LAND USE 24

Existing Land Use Patterns 25
Future Land Use 26

PART IV: IMPLEMENTATION 38

Action Plan 39

GLOSSARY
APPENDICES

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE

Introduction

Background

The City of Graham is at a key point of change in its history. The economics and job base have changed, growth is occurring all around the City, the historic downtown area is poised for revitalization, and expectations are high.

Graham is a small community with rich history, a cultural center, and seat of Alamance County, North Carolina. The City is centered around the historic County Courthouse and hosts a high quality of life for residents, a diverse job market for workers and employers, quality educational opportunities for students, and exciting historic and cultural destinations for tourists and visitors. Incorporated in 1851, today Graham finds itself within a growing megalopolis that stretches from Raleigh to Atlanta.

Many forces are at play in the growth and dynamism of Graham, the Piedmont area, and the Southeastern United States. Graham's population is growing and diversifying, which results in new issues and priorities. Nearby agriculture and working lands have contributed to the character of the area. Meanwhile the community faces dynamic, complex, and interrelated political, environmental, and economic challenges. The City is poised to address these challenges by capitalizing on its many assets, protecting vital resources, and implementing strategic long-term investments.

The Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is the guiding policy document for Graham and provides the community an opportunity to outline how it will grow through visions, goals, and policies. The plan is implemented through action-oriented strategies that address issues including opportunities downtown and in key potential growth areas, local and regional transportation, public facilities and services, the natural environment, Graham's historic character, housing and neighborhoods, and economic growth and development.

While Graham has several plans that address issues ranging from hazard mitigation to pedestrian network enhancement, one unified plan is necessary for ensuring orderly, efficient, and resourceful growth and development in the community in an integrated manner. This Comprehensive Plan weaves together many previous planning efforts and also addresses emerging trends and new ideas to encourage community involvement and build opportunity in Graham.

A key document that has provided policy guidance to the City over the past decade has been the City's Growth Management Plan. Adopted in 2000, this plan has served as Graham's comprehensive plan, helping the City grow and improve quality of life. Over time issues and context have changed. The 2000 Growth Management Plan needs to be updated for the following reasons:

- Many of the action items are accomplished;
- The population has changed;
- Local, regional, national, and global changes have resulted in new knowledge and thinking.

These accomplishments and changes justify the need for a new framework that builds from, reevaluates, and reprioritizes the Growth Management Plan's legacy goals and policies. This new 2035 Comprehensive Plan provides that framework.

The key message: This is a time of opportunity. Graham is in a process of substantial change. The combination of loss of a textile-related employment base, strategic geographic locational advantages in a fast-growing regional economy, shifting trends in demographic profiles, and possibilities of new energy and resources help set the stage for positive growth into the future.

Public Engagement

During preparation of this Comprehensive Plan, Graham residents and stakeholders provided feedback that help to identify several important overarching issues and opportunities. The key themes emerging from this public engagement included the following:

Grow Downtown

Downtown is critical to the City's success and should be the focus of new investments and development, including adaptive reuse projects, public art installments, building restorations, use diversification, infrastructure upgrades, small business development, and more.

Preserve and Promote Graham's History

The historic character of Graham is essential to the City's future and should be preserved in order to promote economic development. Historic preservation and using Graham's history as an asset will also help maintain and grow a sense of community identity.

Improve Schools

Graham's public schools, and the perception of the public schools, are key factors in the future life of the community and there are opportunities for improvements.

Increase Walkability

Many of Graham's residents want to be able to walk safely to parks, museums, stores, and restaurants and believe that the new plan should improve the accessibility of these assets to existing and future neighborhoods.

Expand Economic Opportunity

Attracting more high-wage jobs into Graham should be a high priority. Partnerships are needed to help stimulate job growth.

Increase Local and Regional Accessibility

Graham is unique because of its small town character, great parks, and access to regional opportunities. This is very important to residents and visitors and should be maintained and enhanced. One area needing attention is expansion of regional transit options.

Plan Framework

This plan is designed to be readable and accessible to the public, and provide pertinent information and guidance to decision-makers. A Community Profile, which documents current and historic conditions, is available as a separate dynamic document to be consistently updated as new data are provided from City, state, and national resources.

From visioning to decision-making, this plan establishes a hierarchy of information to guide the process. These components include vision statements, followed by goals that the City aims to achieve. Under each goal are policies and strategies that will be used by decision-makers to help prioritize projects and implement the plan. Together these components support and inform decision-making by linking broad ideas and priorities based upon existing conditions to recommended guidance and detailed actions.

Progress on implementing the recommendations of this plan should be monitored and regularly reported to the community. As new trends become apparent within the Community Profile or other documents that reveal significant change in the existing conditions, realigned priorities of the public, or new facts and information that justify the addition, subtraction, or amendment of the goals, policies, and strategies in this Plan, an update of the Plan should be prepared.

A review of Plan implementation and changed conditions should be conducted annually. The Steering Committee that provided leadership and guidance in preparation of this plan should be reconvened on an annual basis, to review progress, conditions, and to make a report to the City Council. A full update of the Plan should be scheduled for preparation five years after Plan adoption.

Our Vision

Following is a set of vision statements for Graham, expressing the aspirations of this community for a vibrant future. These visions are based on input from the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, Graham's public meetings, interviews with community stakeholders, and online comments provided by residents.

A Distinct Community Character

Graham will be a vibrant, exciting, and distinct place that serves as a source of pride for all who call this community their home. This strong community character attracts a high quality of life, new opportunities, and acts to retain young members and families within the area.

Connected City, Accessible Region

Graham will be a connected, accessible, and mobile City, where transportation to and from opportunities is not a barrier and where residents have convenient and accessible moblity options. From Graham, anyone has affordable access to opportunities throughout the Piedmont.

A Strong and Equitable Economy

With an environment that supports business development, entrepreneurialism, and labor training for a variety of industries and occupations, Graham will be a City with high quality employment opportunities for a diverse workforce. Local spending will help to sustain and grow local companies and foster economic development.

Exceptional Public Facilities and Services

Public facilities will meet and exceed the expectations of residents and visitors, and provide the community with opportunities to gather, get active, learn, and interact with nature. City services will address community needs now and into the future through long-term planning and exceptional customer service.

Diverse Housing, Complete Neighborhoods

Graham will be a desirable place to live because of its variety of high quality housing options, providing affordable choices to people of all backgrounds. Neighborhoods will be walkable, safe, and vibrant and will promote private investment and enhancement of existing and future properties.

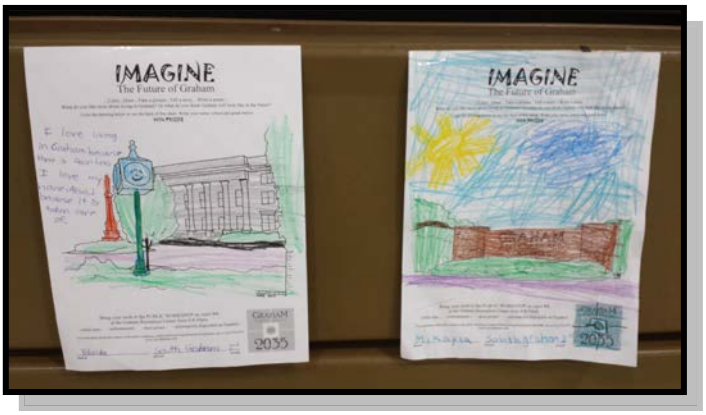
A Place to Live, Work and Play

Graham will be a family-oriented community with active neighborhoods, job opportunities, and abundant recreation amenities.

A Healthy Environment

New growth in Graham will occur sustainably, with minimal impact on the natural environment. Conservation efforts will maintain the health of the watershed, preserve habitat for native plants and animals, as well as reduce pollution through investments in renewable energy sources, clean transportation options, and resource conservation.

PART II: KEY ISSUES



Issue 1: Building upon our Community Character

Background

Like many small historic towns across North Carolina, Graham has a charming character that builds off of well-connected neighborhoods and an attractive urban fabric. This section focuses on the benefits of the City's existing character and how to preserve that character during future growth and expansion, as well as how to promote the City's historic treasures.

The following goals and strategies provide guidance for protecting the City's community appearance. A few of these policies are linked to policies introduced in other sections of this plan, and are important considerations in making adjustments to zoning and land use regulations, recruiting businesses and economic activity, and approaching redevelopment of aging and/or vacant properties.

Goal 1.1 Inviting Community Appearance

Graham will preserve and enhance its community character through attention to community appearance.

Strategy 1.1.1: Wayfinding and Gateways

Develop an upgraded "wayfinding" and signage system for installation along gateways and corridors. Designate gateways for entrances to the historic downtown area, and further develop plans for public improvements and landscaping in the gateway areas.

Strategy 1.1.2: Design Guidelines

Develop commercial and residential site design guidelines that enhance community character and appearance, to be used with special use permit and conditional rezoning applications.

Strategy 1.1.3: Tree Planting

Expand public and private tree planting initiatives in appropriate locations.

Strategy 1.1.4: Underground Utilities

Encourage the placement of utility wires underground, especially in the downtown area.

Strategy 1.1.5: Discourage Strip Development

Discourage highway strip development along transportation arteries and proposed interstate interchanges by directing these commercial activities to proposed activity centers.

Goal 1.2 Historic Preservation

Graham will continue to value its history and culture and preserve elements of its historic character.

Strategy 1.2.1: Historic District

Consider designating the North Main Street National Historic District as a local historic district.

Strategy 1.2.2: Interstate Signage

Obtain a "State Historic Site" sign along the interstate to recognize the Courthouse Square and North Main Street Historic Districts.

Strategy 1.2.3: Tourism

Encourage tourism within the Town Center through promotional campaigns that highlight the Court House Square and North Main Street Historic Districts.

Goal 1.3 Key Development Areas

Graham will focus on key sections of the City to help achieve desired forms of development and redevelopment.

Strategy 1.3.1: Small Area Plans

Prepare Small Area Plans for Downtown and for development/redevelopment of the North Main Street historic area.

Strategy 1.3.2: Town Center and S. Main Street

Initiate a corridor improvement program for the Town Center and South Main Street that will place utilities underground, improve pedestrian crossings, and construct a landscaped median on South Main Street.

Strategy 1.3.3: East Harden

Prepare a corridor plan to guide development and public investment in the East Harden/NC54 corridor.

Issue 2: Bringing Business to Graham

Background

Every successful City has a strong economic foundation with a broad number of choices in education and employment. Graham has many assets that make it an ideal place to live and work, with a high potential for economic growth and investment. This section outlines strategies for creating opportunities for small-business growth, workforce training, and attracting firms that can provide good jobs and grow the City's economy.

Graham's economic development principles outline some of the community's guiding values, which include the following:

Create vibrant centers, especially downtown

Graham should grow employment and a mix of uses around downtown and focus areas. Vibrant centers create spillover effects and foster small business development and innovation. Create the next generation of employment sanctuaries by facilitating development through public-private partnerships.

Improve access to living wage jobs

Good quality jobs for low educated workers are critical for the future of Graham. Household prosperity varies greatly by employment type. Graham's economic foundation was built on manufacturing, which has seen declines over the past several decades.

Maximize land use efficiency

Communities are often tempted to support inefficient development in the name of economic growth. This can end up leading to higher costs to the public in the long term.

Graham should plan for the efficient allocation and use of infrastructure over time, especially within employment and industrial areas.

Make education a strong point

An educated population and skilled workforce are critical for promoting economic development. Schools in Graham represent a huge asset for promoting the City and improving the area's quality of life. Alamance Community College should become a focal point within the City and region.

> "Graham would benefit from aggressively seeking entrepreneurs and investors who would restore the city's historic, crumbling buildings and open businesses such as restaurants, galleries, antique shops, performing arts venues, and food stores. This would create local jobs, generate tax revenue and promote Graham as a premiere North Carolina city. Restoring and revitalizing the downtown area of Graham will attract new residents to the city and bring increased consumer spending."
> -Elaine M.

Attractive compact built form

It may be tempting to view any growth as an indicator of success and a healthy economy, however conventional development patterns – forms of development which tend to be

dispersed and disconnected – can pose future challenges to meet the fiscal, social, environmental, public health, and long term economic development needs of the community and puts at risk achievement of the goals in this plan. On the other hand, developing exciting places with bike paths, sidewalks, and other pedestrian-oriented elements is an important economic development technique. With its rich history and charming small-town character, Graham can be a destination within the state and a high quality living and working environment.

Growing Sustainably

Several cities and towns in the area have capitalized off of conservation of rivers and forests, not only by promoting and benefiting from tourism, but also through less tangible long-term economic benefits. Greening neighborhoods and commercial districts with street trees and parks have been proven through research to directly increase the value of property and support economic development.

Goal 2.1 A Resilient Economy

Graham will have a diverse and robust local economy fostered by economic development opportunities.

Policy 2.1.1: Diverse job market

A diversified job market that provides employment opportunities for persons with varying education levels and skill sets is needed and encouraged.

Policy 2.1.2: Prioritize and Market Education

Graham will increase accessibility to education through strategic and coordinated investments. The City will market itself as a leader in education and cutting-edge educational opportunities at all levels.

Policy 2.1.3: Economic resilience

Graham improves its economic resilience to economic, social, and environmental instability through a strong local economy and equitable opportunities for prosperity.

Policy 2.1.4: Competitive advantage

Graham works to strengthen its existing comparative economic advantages including a high quality and highly diverse workforce, local education and research institutions, and high quality of life.

Policy 2.1.5: Regional coordination

Graham will work to promote a positive economic environment by working to compete with, not against, other local municipalities for high-quality jobs and economic development opportunities.

Policy 2.1.6: Locally owned businesses

Facilitate the creation and growth of small locally-owned businesses and support programs that provide technical and financial assistance to promote sustainable operating practices.

Policy 2.1.7: Partnerships

Graham will continue to develop opportunities for public-private partnerships to coordinate investment strategies and nurture leadership in the community.

Policy 2.1.8: Tourism

Promote Graham as a tourist destination with a focus on Graham's historic downtown, access to the Haw River and Haw River Trail (portion of the North Carolina Mountains-to-Sea Trail), art, museums, and parks.

Strategy 2.1.1: Business Incubation

Develop a business incubation program to encourage development of new business ventures.

Strategy 2.1.2: Collaborate with regional networks

Utilize resources available through UNC Chapel Hill and other state government authorities and non-profits to develop and evaluate economic development programs.

Strategy 2.1.3: Partner with business leaders

Work with local business leaders and school district officials to provide supplemental community investments in local schools and Alamance Community College.

Strategy 2.1.4: Planning capacity

Identify federal and state funding sources and the potential addition of planning staff to expand Graham's long-term planning and economic development capacity. Explore options for a Graham-specific entity to focus solely on economic development within the city.

Strategy 2.1.5: Reduce barriers

Work with local businesses and economic development partners to identify and address unnecessary barriers to local business development.

Strategy 2.1.6: Business opportunity information

Provide a clearinghouse for information on locating a business in Graham and the available State and local resources available to small business, including funding, training, grants, and location assistance.

Goal 2.2 Affordable Community

Graham will continue to be an affordable place to live, work, and play for residents and workers of central North Carolina.

Policy 2.2.1: Focused development

In order to maintain Graham's affordability and promote growth, the City will facilitate smart growth development by promoting infill development and focused, walkable, and mixed use built environments.

Policy 2.2.2: Living wages

Promote the creation of living wage jobs, and promote living wages when considering economic development incentives and investments. Expand living wage opportunities for people without 4-year college degrees.

Strategy 2.2.1: Job Development

Provide support and assistance to the business recruitment efforts of the Alamance County Chamber of Commerce, seeking to attract a range of employment opportunities.

Goal 2.3 Prosperous Centers

Graham is home to several nodal employment centers that contain a variety of businesses, uses, and services.

Policy 2.3.1: Downtown

A vibrant downtown is critical for Graham's economic success. Graham's downtown is a priority when considering incentives, investments, regulations, and marketing. Encourage entertainment options to locate within Graham's downtown.

Policy 2.3.2: Innovative spaces, spaces of innovation

Graham promotes the development of flex space, live-work units, and adaptive structures for office, retail, and light industry.

Policy 2.3.3: Retail centers

Because of market limitations on the amount retail space the City can viably support, Graham promotes retail within focused centers of activity that will host a large variety of small retail spaces while generally discouraging sprawling isolated retail that does not promote a cohesive urban fabric.

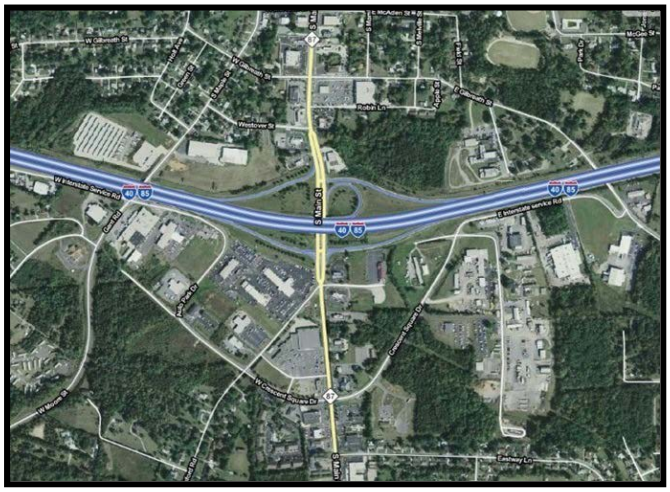
Strategy 2.3.1: Facilitate focused development

Incentivize pedestrian-oriented nodal development consistent with this plan by incentivizing smart growth development. The City could choose to utilize some of the following methods:

- Expedited permit review
- Deferred tax payments
- Covering some building expenses
- Low-interest loans
- Providing infrastructure
- Flexible and innovative regulations
- Small area plans

Strategy 2.3.2: Prepare Development Strategies for Interchange Areas

Prepare and implement strategies to promote business development around the City's three interstate interchanges.



Goal 2.4 Industry

Graham will foster industrial development with areas that include flex space developments, incubator districts for emerging local businesses, industrial headquarters offices, and dispersed neighborhood employment areas. These areas will promote opportunities for middle-wage jobs and upward mobility.

Policy 2.4.1: NC Commerce Park

Promote growth of Graham's primary job creation opportunity, a joint planning area known as the North Carolina Commerce Park (NCCP), due to its location, regional accessibility, and highly developable status.

Strategy 2.4.1: NCCP Development

Develop a plan for the employment district in order to maximize economic growth within this area. Align plans and investments with efforts to recruit and grow strategic business opportunities in the NCCP.

Strategy 2.4.2: Promote Industrial Redevelopment

Encourage reinvestment and intensification at existing industrial sites. Encourage redevelopment of existing buildings and infrastructure for industrial growth.

Strategy 2.4.3: Freight Corridors

Encourage freight-oriented industrial development to locate where it can maximize access to major freight routes, including I-40/85 and state highways.

Strategy 2.4.4: Green Industry Growth

Encourage improvements to the cleanliness, safety, and ecological performance of industrial development and freight corridors by facilitating adoption of new technology and design, conserving trees on industrial properties, and use of renewable energy sources.

Strategy 2.4.5: Attract green industry

Work to attract environmentally responsible companies and foster growth in green industries in Graham.

Issue 3: Accessing Local and Regional Opportunities

Background

Good transportation is critical for a thriving City. That means having a system that supports the flow of industrial and commercial goods as well as builds context-sensitive networks within compact and vibrant built living environments. But a good system is expensive and cities need to develop efficient systems and find innovative funding solutions for slimmer budgets and increasing populations.

Following World War II, cities across the country designed transportation networks primarily to accommodate the automobile. Historic structures were torn down to make way for parking lots, cherished neighborhoods bulldozed for freeways, and new development and investment became directed toward low density automobile-oriented development on the urban periphery. Graham was not an exception, but the City's moderate growth and small town charm meant that it largely maintained its interconnected network of streets near the City center. While some recent development has created disconnected street patterns, this plan seeks to reverse that trend and promote the interconnectivity of streets within future development.

This section builds off of the City's existing Growth Management Plan to promote safe, efficient, interconnected, multimodal transportation systems that foster vibrant neighborhoods and economic development. Through goals, actions, and policies it discusses the existing transportation network in Graham and identifies opportunities for short-term and long-term improvements.

"I want Graham to be a 'walk-to' city, where people can access everything no matter where in the city limits they live, as opposed to a 'drive through' city where they bypass us and go to Mebane or Burlington."

-Christopher M.

"Having options for those who don't have a car or want to leave their car at home sometimes would be great."

-John P.

A Multi-Modal System

In Graham, a multimodal system means a transportation network designed for more than just cars and trucks, but also bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Streets

Streets not only conduct the flow of car and truck traffic but also serve as points of interest in the community. For example, a good neighborhood street can safely serve as a child's play area, and commercial streets with coffee shops and businesses can flourish into vibrant public spaces with outdoor tables and artwork.

Pedestrians

The overwhelming consensus of academic studies is that walkability improves property values, economic development, and personal health. Walkability improves with more than just infrastructure and is measured primarily by quantifying the 3 Ds: density, diversity, and design. That is, the density of interesting things within a given area, the diversity of places that you walk past, and the layout of the street network. This plan promotes walkability and seeks to improve the pedestrian realm in Graham.

Bicycling

Bicycling can serve as both a form of transportation and of leisure and exercise. This plan seeks to aggressively improve the viability of bicycling as a legitimate method of accessing opportunities and points of interest. Transportation and park facilities should be designed to safely accommodate bicyclists of all ages and riding abilities.

Transit

With the exception of a Burlington-funded route to Alamance Community College, Graham is not currently served by a fixed-route transit system. Availability of public transit within the City of Graham is a potential option in the future.

Commuting

Most people who live in Graham work elsewhere and most jobs in Graham belong to people living outside of the City. Accessibility to onramps for I-40/85 is important. Street connectivity is key because it increases the number of viable paths to and from onramps, home, and places of interest.

Parking

Though the plan promotes multiple modes of transportation, it does not ignore the fact that most people in Graham own vehicles and use them to travel to work, the store, and recreational areas. Many businesses rely on sufficient parking capacity to attract customers. This plan accommodates parking yet acknowledges that it should not jeopardize pedestrian safety and accessibility.

Streets and Alleyways

Alleys are important because they enhance the frontage of businesses and homes by moving things like trash, recycling, parking, and utilities to the back of buildings. This improves the aesthetic quality of the neighborhood. They also remove curb cuts and driveways from the front of businesses, which reduces the risk of a collision with pedestrians and bicyclists on the sidewalk.

Goal 3.1 Context-Sensitive Transportation

The design of Graham's streets will fit in with and enhance the adjacent land uses.

Policy 3.1.1: Context-Sensitive Infrastructure

New transportation Infrastructure should promote and correspond with the land use goals of the Graham 2035 Comprehensive Plan, including the Future Land Use Map.

Policy 3.1.2: Safe Access to Businesses and Homes

Limit direct highway access or the number of curb cuts to commercial activities by directing development to proposed regional and village centers and requiring internal connectivity between commercial uses, uniformity in design standards, and rear alley access where feasible.

Policy 3.1.3: Parking Behind Buildings

Encourage off-street parking to be located in the rear of new commercial buildings with accessed provided by alleys.

Policy 3.1.4: Shared Automobile Parking

To improve parking efficiency and limit the development cost of parking, promote shared parking arrangements.

Strategy 3.1.1: Parking Space Maximums

Include flexibility and incentives in zoning regulations to encourage approaches that avoid the overdevelopment of parking.

Goal 3.2 Dense and Interconnected Transportation Network

Graham's road network will be highly connected with short walkable blocks and multiple pathways to any single destination in the City.

Policy 3.2.1: Connectivity

Promote interconnectivity within residential and commercial developments.

Policy 3.2.2: Road Network

An adopted Thoroughfare Plan Map should indicate the location of future roads throughout Graham and provide a coordinated, efficient, and dense street network.

Policy 3.2.3: Fewer Dead-end Streets

Discourage or prohibit the development of cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets in new projects.

Policy 3.2.4: Greenway system

Promote a greenway system that links together the City's recreational resources and provides connections to commercial, employment, and residential areas. Greenways along stream buffers should be prioritized in order to protect the stream watershed.

Strategy 3.2.1: Improve Connectivity

Encourage maximum block lengths and minimum right-of-way connectivity ratios.

> "There are still long stretches of roads with no sidewalk and little or no shoulder, which makes it difficult to combine errands with exercise."
>
> -Jeff T.

Strategy 3.2.2: Dense Future Road Network

Coordinate with NCDOT and BGMPO to develop and implement a City Street Plan and Thoroughfare Plan to have minor roads built by developers and maintain a dense interconnected road network.

Strategy 3.2.3: InterCity Bikeway System

Partner with Burlington, Mebane, other local communities, and the MPO to develop an intercity bikeway system, preferably including off-street bike paths and greenways.

Strategy 3.2.4: Haw River Trail

Coordinate with NCDOT, Alamance County Recreation and Parks Department, and other entities to build and maintain the Haw River Trail.

Strategy 3.2.5: Future Transit Options

Consider coordinating within the region to implement a transit system for citizens to access the governmental offices located in downtown Graham, and increase accessibility to Alamance Community College.

Goal 3.3 Multimodal Street Design

Graham will have efficient, safe, and accessible streets that accommodate many travelers and protect Graham's community character.

Policy 3.3.1: Complete Streets

New roads and road improvements should be designed as complete streets that are designed to provide access to all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles. Ideally, on all non-industrial and non-rural streets, 50% of the right-of-way should serve bicyclists and pedestrians while the other 50% should serve automobile traffic.

> "For us the biggest obstacle to a healthier lifestyle is a lack of safe bike lanes. As we look to grow Graham, bike lanes would be a wonderful blessing."
> -Keith D.

Policy 3.3.2: Limit Street Width

Reduce roadway lane widths in order to slow down vehicular traffic in areas where bicycle and pedestrian traffic is encouraged.

Policy 3.3.3: Implement Road Diets

Reduce the number of vehicular lanes in order to paint separated bicycle lanes and allow for on-street parallel parking in areas where bicycle and pedestrian traffic is encouraged.

Policy 3.3.4: More Sidewalks

Increase sidewalks on future and existing roads.

Policy 3.3.5: Increase Safety

Provide for pedestrian and bicycle safety at all street crossings, including cross-walks, bulbouts, signage, and tight curb return radii.

Strategy 3.3.1: Sidewalks and Street Trees

Amend subdivision and zoning regulations to promote and provide incentives for all new development to include sidewalks and street trees, especially where part of the adopted Pedestrian Plan.

Strategy 3.3.2: Increase Bicycle Parking

Amend zoning regulations to encourage the installation of bicycle parking for all new development.

Strategy 3.3.3: Amend Street Cross-Sections

Amend street cross-sections with the intent of increasing the right-of-way width serving pedestrians, bicyclists, and low-impact stormwater infrastructure.

Issue 4: Enhancing our Public Facilities and Services

Background

Future growth will affect emergency and public services and public facilities for current and future residents. The City of Graham is highly regarded for the quality of its parks and public services. While Graham's continued growth necessitates planning for new infrastructure, it is the primary priority of this plan to maintain existing infrastructure in good repair and to maximize the utilization of investments already made. This plan aims to maintain adequate levels of service, reduce energy and maintenance costs, protect water resources, and reduce solid waste.

"Graham has responsive local government and public services staffs. I've never had an issue that the department I contacted didn't help me resolve. This has not been the case in larger towns I've lived in."
-Jeff T.

"Graham will be much more appealing to families/businesses if our school system is improved and has a reputation for excellence. Once a good school system is in place and employment opportunities offering higher wages become available, all other components of Graham's growth will likely enjoy success as well."
-John P.

Education is a primary concern of people living in Graham and it is a critically important topic because of education's strong correlation with quality of life and economic development. The City is served by several public schools within the Alamance-Burlington School System, including four elementary schools, two middle schools, three high schools, and a combined middle/high school. Additionally, Alamance Community College is located in Graham. Although the City does not control school budgets or policies, this plan will suggest collaborative actions that can be taken to improve education. There are multiple

opportunities for Graham's residents, business leaders, and stakeholders to become more involved in enhancing the conditions and operations of public schools within the City.

Goal 4.1 Schools

The community will see continued improvement in the facilities and curricula offered for the education of Graham's student populations.

Strategy 4.1.1: Increase Community Involvement in Public Schools

Initiate a local effort to increase community involvement in Graham's public schools, through parent outreach, increased resources for after-school programs, mentoring, and support for teachers and facilities.

Strategy 4.1.2: Establish Communications and Coordination Mechanisms with the Alamance-Burlington School System

Work with the elected and administrative leadership of the County School System to identify additional opportunities for information-sharing and collaboration in support of facilities and student/family needs.

Goal 4.2 Parks

Graham will continue to develop and operate high quality recreation facilities.

Graham is home to several parks including Bill Cooke, Marshall Street, Greenway, Oakley Street, and South Graham Parks. Additionally, Graham offers recreational opportunities at the Graham Recreation Center, the Maple Street Center, Graham Civic Center, Haw River Access and other locations throughout the City. This plan aims to promote the continued high quality service provided by the City and County's Recreation and Parks departments.

Strategy 4.2.1: Greenways

Continue to develop a greenway system that links together the City's recreational resources.

Strategy 4.2.2: Continue efforts to develop Graham's new Community Park.

Continue efforts to develop the future City of Graham Recreation Complex.

Goal 4.3 Water/Wastewater Systems

Graham will continue to coordinate with the City of Mebane to operate efficient and quality water distribution and treatment systems.

The City of Graham operates a combined enterprise fund for Water and Sewer and is co-owner of the Graham-Mebane Water Treatment Plant with the City of Mebane. The plant is located on Graham-Mebane Lake in the northeastern part of Alamance County. The lake provides 2.8 billion gallons of storage and the water treatment plant has a treatment capacity of 12 million gallons per day and treated water storage capacity of six million gallons. In addition to serving Graham and Mebane, the Towns of Green Level and Swepsonville are also served by this plant. The City's water currently meets federal and state water quality requirements and is projected to meet demand over the

lifetime of this plan. In addition to these large fixed investments, the City's utility systems need continual investment to keep pace with growing demand, replace aging facilities, and keep systems in a state of good repair.

Policy 4.3.1: Land Use Patterns

Promote development of efficient land use patterns to allow continued quality and efficiency of water systems. Discourage the extension of water service into areas that are not most suitable for development.

Strategy 4.3.2: Conserve Water Resources

Through education outreach, infrastructure, and service pricing, promote the conservation of water resources for long term security.

Strategy 4.3.3: Increase Use of Reclaimed Water

Promote the use of reclaimed water by incentivizing rainwater collection and other forms of reclaiming water.

Strategy 4.3.4: Water Efficient Construction

Incorporate water saving and water efficient construction incentives into appropriate development regulations.

Strategy 4.3.5: Adjust Land Use Regulations

Amend zoning regulations to create a new Rural zone, and work with Alamance County to expand Graham's Extraterritorial Jurisdiction to align with expected development patterns.

"We have such wonderful parks both city and county around here, and that's what we need to keep open and beautiful."

-Hope M.

Issue 5: Expanding our Housing Options

Background

Local and nationwide demographic changes are resulting in new housing needs and preferences. This section outlines strategies for protecting home values, promoting home investments, and maintaining diverse high quality residential neighborhoods.

This section also includes strategies for healthy and active living environments.

Equity

Shelter is a basic human need, yet not everyone in Graham has safe and healthy living environments. Race, income, immigration status, limited English proficiency, sexual orientation, and disability can limit choices. Working to provide a fair and equitable housing market is essential for expanding choice and opportunity for everyone in Graham, and creating a strong and inclusive community.

Housing + Transportation

The low cost of high quality homes is one thing that makes Graham an attractive place to live. The average household in Graham spends less than thirty percent of their income on housing. But, while housing is affordable, current transportation patterns are costing those living, working, and studying in Graham. An average household owns 2 vehicles, drives 27,000 miles annually, and spends more on transportation than on housing. The idea of affordability should be reexamined and location needs to become an important consideration in the development of new housing.

Goal 5.1: Housing Options

Regardless of family size, income level, or other factors, people in Graham have access to housing choices that accommodate their needs and desires.

Policy 5.1.1: Housing variety

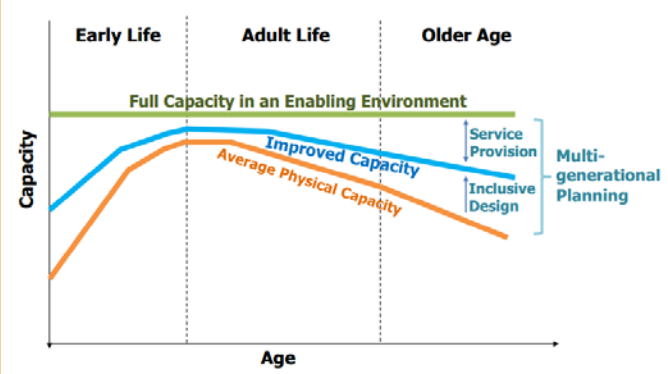
Encourage a mix of housing types within Graham to increase choice. These can include single family dwelling units, multifamily dwelling units, small units, pre-fabricated homes, co-housing, and clustered housing.

Policy 5.1.2: Variety of ownership opportunities

Encourage a variety of homeownership opportunities and choices by supporting the development of condominiums, cooperatives, and land trusts.

Graham: A Multigenerational City

Multigenerational planning is a comprehensive approach to community and economic development that enables people of all ages and abilities to lead active and fulfilling lives. By developing diverse communities we create neighborhoods where young people can afford to live, families can comfortably raise children, and growing elderly populations may remain rooted in the communities that they care about.



Source: Planning Across Generations Project

Goal 5.2: Housing Equity

All persons who live and work in Graham, regardless of income, age, or ability, have the opportunity to rent or purchase safe, decent, accessible, and affordable housing in complete neighborhoods.

Policy 5.2.1: Diverse Neighborhoods

Encourage a mix of housing types within Graham, including detached, duplex, multifamily, townhomes, and live-work units.

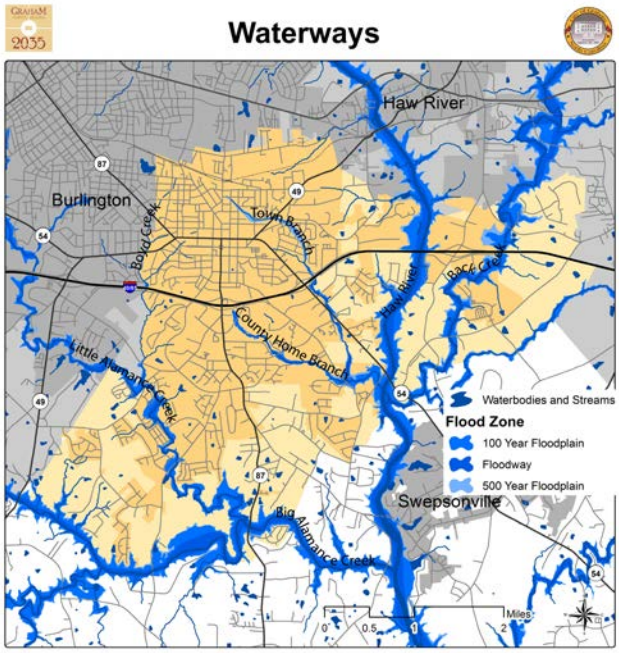
Policy 5.2.2: Multigenerational Housing

Promote buildings and neighborhood designs that serve multiple age groups simultaneously and meet the needs of young people, families, older adults, and people with disabilities, especially in focus areas and in close proximity to services.

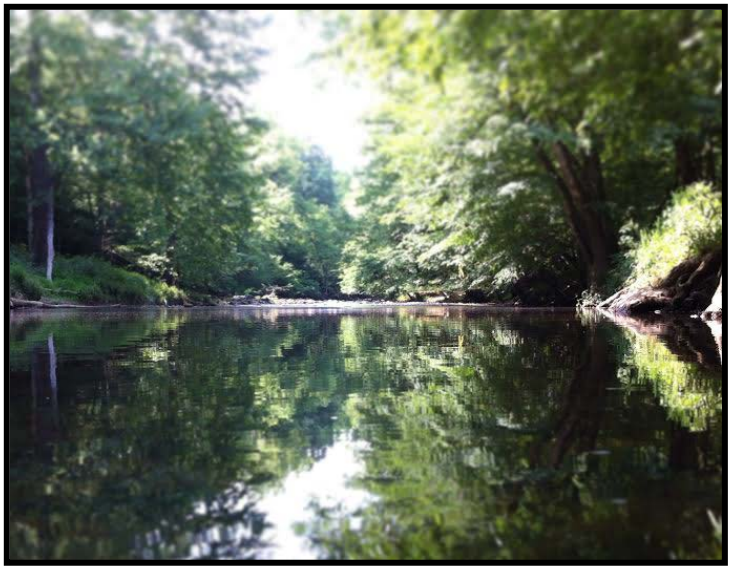
Issue 6: Conserving our Natural Environment

Background

Conservation of the environment plays a major role in fostering long-term economic growth, as well as providing better air and water quality and recreational opportunities. This section provides strategies for decreasing Graham's development impact on the natural environment.



Decision makers across the state and around the country are increasingly recognizing the environmental impacts of growth and development. Such awareness has burgeoned due to longstanding environmental neglect: urban sprawl, loss of agricultural and rural lands, habitat loss and fragmentation, and increased pollution of our air and water. This plan recognizes that environmental protection and long term economic development go hand in hand.



Watershed Health

Everyone lives in a watershed, yet many of us take for granted the streams that go by our backyards and wind under bridges and through underground culverts. Graham lies within the Cape Fear River Basin. Several freshwater streams run through the City's corporate limits including:

- Haw River
- Town Branch
- County Home Branch
- Big Alamance Creek
- Back Creek (Little Creek)
- Little Alamance Creek
- Bowden Branch (Boyd Creek)

Decreasing polluted runoff into these streams is critically important because of the high social, environmental, and economic value of these waters, which are used for fishing, kayaking, canoeing, trails, greenbelts, parks, aesthetics, riparian vegetation, wildlife habitat, and drinking water. Several scientific studies have found that by protecting streams, communities benefit from increased tax bases, recreation-oriented businesses, tourism, state and federal government expenditures, and corporate

relocations. Additionally, protecting streams can reduce costs for services such as roads, sewers, and flood control.

Low Impact Development

Low impact development (LID) is an approach to urban development, redevelopment, and retrofits that works with nature to manage stormwater as close to its source as possible. LID employs principles such as preserving and recreating natural landscape features and minimizing impervious surface area. In practice, LID facilities include bioretention areas, rain gardens, green roofs, rain barrels, and swales. Implementing LID can benefit communities by reducing the impact of built-up areas and promoting the natural movement of water within the watershed.

Goal 6.1: Improve Stream Health

Streams within Graham's planning area will be clean and healthy, with heavily vegetated and connected riparian buffers that make Graham more attractive and are home to many species of plants and animals. This goal seeks to reduce non-point source pollution and minimize soil erosion and sedimentation.

Strategy 6.1.1: Water Quality BMPs

Use non-structural best management practices (BMPs) to improve water quality, such as public education program and monitoring and control of illicit discharges.

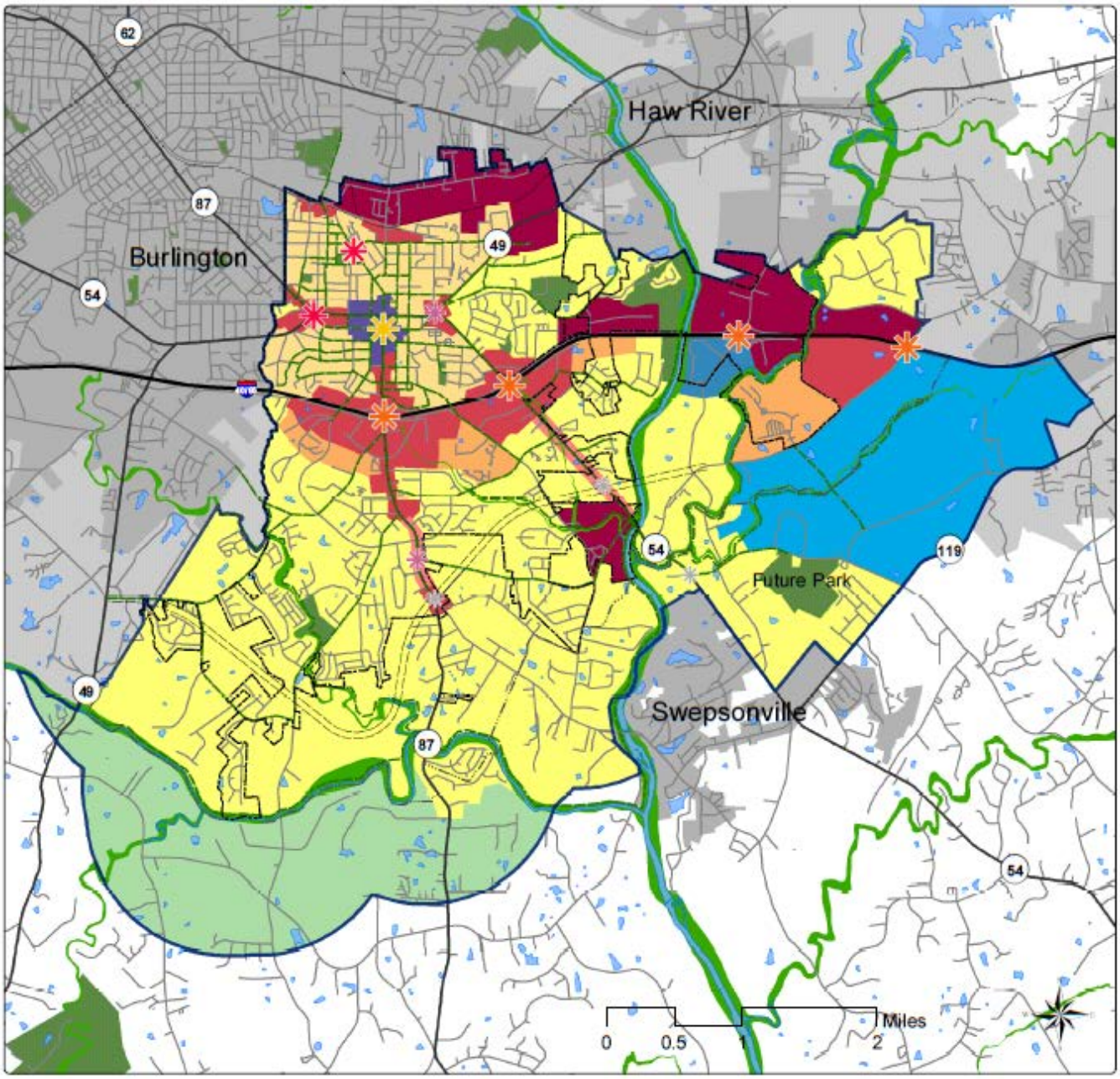
Strategy 6.1.2: Low Impact Development

Promote the use of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to mitigate the impacts of stormwater runoff. Such techniques should include the use of green roofs, rain gardens, cisterns, and rain barrels, as well as reducing impermeable surfaces and restricting unnecessary grading and clearing of natural vegetation.

Strategy 6.1.3: Wastewater Reuse

Explore the reuse of treated wastewater at Graham's wastewater treatment plant to further reduce the nitrogen and phosphorous load to the Haw River and reduce non-potable water consumption where feasible.

PART III: LAND USE



Existing Land Use Patterns

BACKGROUND

The Future Land Use Map provides direction for land use changes in Graham over time. Future land use designations provide information on where and how to grow in an efficient, sustainable, and orderly manner. Physical form is a critical component of future growth and this section addresses development patterns in Graham. The Future Land Use Map follows several growth principles, and will guide the City's land use decisions. These guiding principles are:

Develop a compact, mixed-use, and focused pattern of growth

Graham will focus compact development in well-defined areas in order to increase the viability of regional transit, preserve open space, rural areas, and environmentally sensitive lands, efficiently provide public services and infrastructure, and promote infill development and redevelopment. Compact growth areas include a number of communitywide activity destinations, including downtown and future mixed-use activity centers that will serve as focal points and centers of activity.

Increase travel choice among residents and visitors

Present day land use and transportation patterns primarily accommodate a single mode of travel: the automobile. The City's new growth pattern will facilitate travel for automobiles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Transportation infrastructure will use context-sensitive solutions and will be organized around and woven into a compact pattern of small blocks with interconnected streets and paths.

Provide an interconnected system of open lands

Maintaining open space provides recreational opportunities, conserves natural habitats, and reduces the harmful impacts of urban runoff into waterways. The objectives are to provide Graham residents with access to open space and promote the City as a destination for

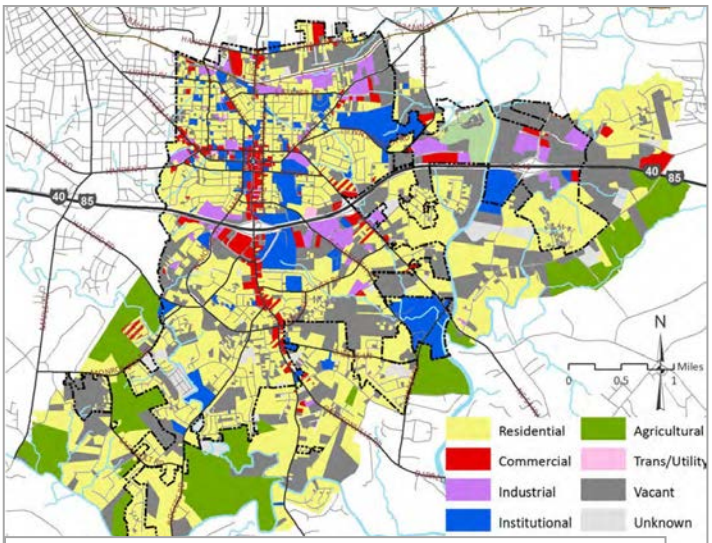
outdoor recreation by maintaining and expanding its network of trails, greenways, bikeways, parks, and open space.

Reduce greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions

Land use and transportation patterns have direct effects on greenhouse gas emissions and air and water pollutants. By focusing development in a compact, pedestrian-oriented, and mixed-use manner this plan aims to reduce energy use, expenditures, and daily automobile trips while maintaining a high quality of life for people who live and work in Graham.

Existing Land Use Patterns

The existing land use map shows general land uses within the City of Graham and its ETJ. Over the years this land use pattern developed as a result of market forces and previous land use policies and zoning regulations. Comparing the prior future land use plan to existing land uses shows that development has generally remained consistent with previous spatial policies.



Existing Land Use in Graham

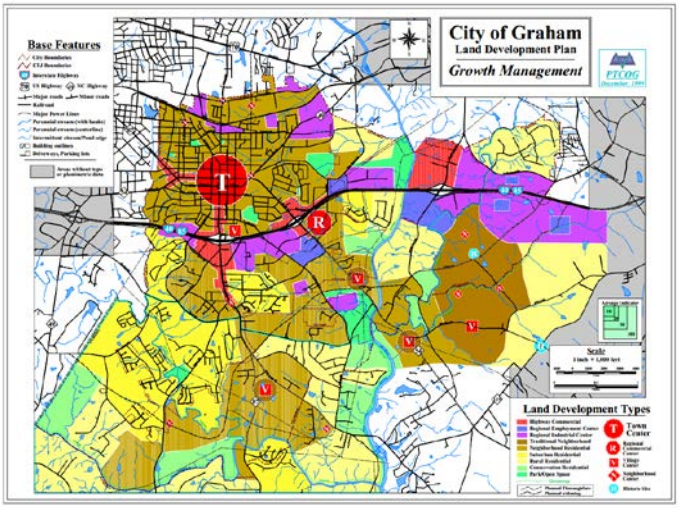
The Future Land Use Map, which guides long term policy and land use decisions, is distinct from the zoning map, which amounts to direct regulation of land use, density, and dimensions within the boundaries of the City and its ETJ. The Future Land Use Map is one of the community's tools to wisely shape the City's future over time.

Future Land Use

BACKGROUND

The Future Land Use Map provides direction for land use changes in Graham over time. Future land use designations provide information

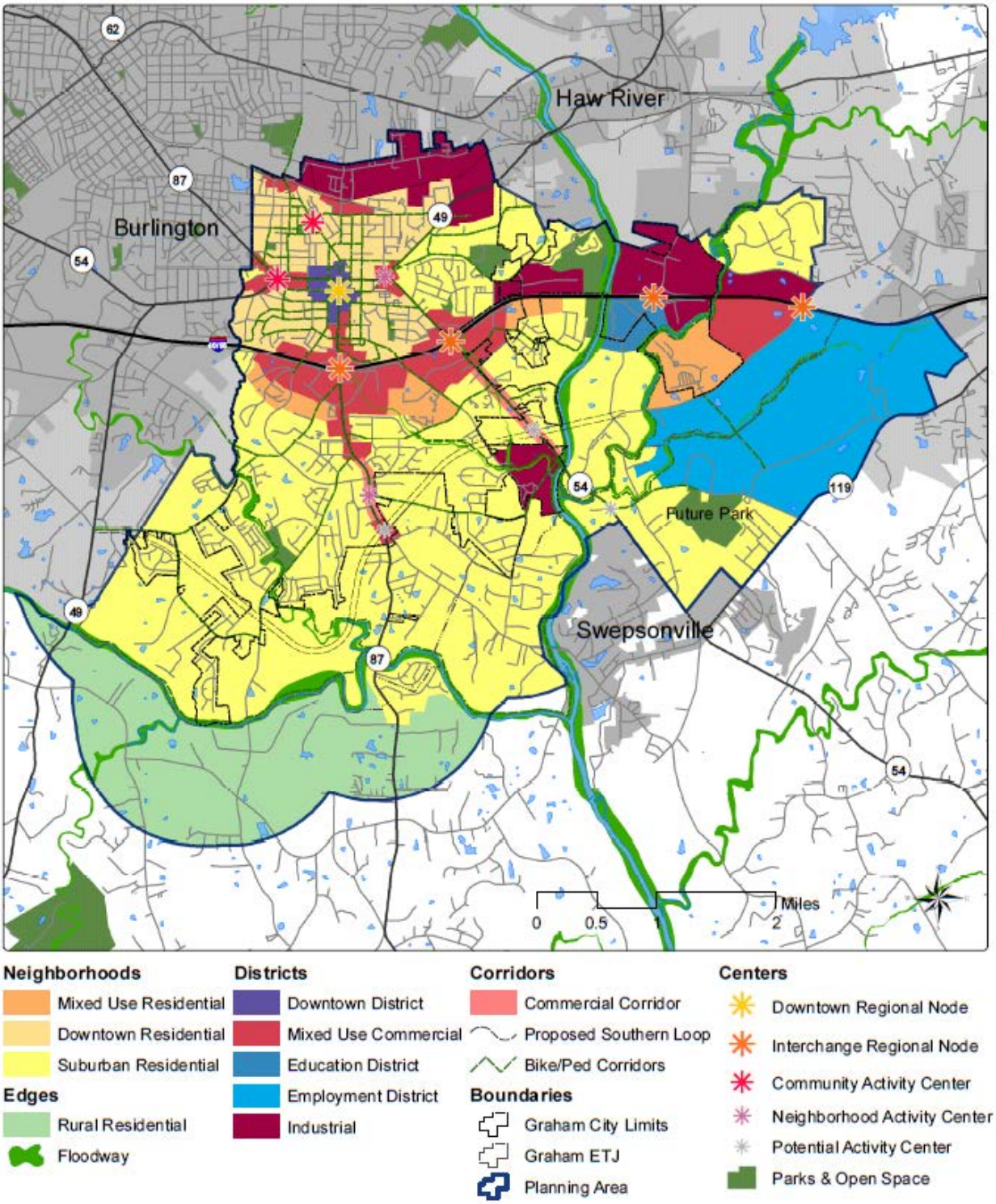
Graham's previous future land use plan was adopted by the City in 2000 with Graham's Growth Management Plan and included nine land use categories. The new Future Land Use Map aims to expand upon the previous plan by re-envisioning the built environment and developing around focused centers.



Graham's previous Future Land Use Map

On the next page, Graham's Future Land Use Plan is displayed, followed by descriptions of the various land use categories and selected illustrations.

Future Land Use Map



Future Land Use Categories

The Future Land Use Map presented here represents a spatial arrangement that reflects the values of the community. While the map represents a two-dimensional development plan to promote orderly development, land use categories provide the third dimension to growth. Land use categories outline the type of encouraged development and provide a guide for zoning changes. This Future Land Use Map was constructed through consideration of six land use concepts:

- Neighborhoods
- Districts
- Edges
- Boundaries
- Corridors
- Centers

Each of these components serves a critical function in cities like Graham. Where appropriate, components contain goals and policies that maintain consistency between the future land use categories in order to promote orderly development and a vibrant, unique, and diverse community.

Zoning

The section below addresses the application of the Future Land Use Map for zoning requests and other zoning changes. North Carolina municipal zoning enabling legislation requires that zoning be "in accordance with the comprehensive plan." State zoning statutes also require that Planning Board review of zoning amendments include written comments on the consistency of the proposed amendment with the comprehensive plan and any other relevant plans (such as a small area plan, corridor plan, or transportation plan) that have been adopted by the local government's City council. The council is also required to adopt a statement on plan consistency before adopting or rejecting any zoning amendment. While these written comments are required, they do not limit the council's discretionary power to adopt or not adopt zoning amendments.

Applying Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map establishes the desired development pattern for the City of Graham and serves as a blueprint for future growth. The Future Land Use Map of this plan will be the primary guide for future land use and transportation decisions. The Future Land Use Map of this plan will also serve as a primary guide for future zoning decisions, along with policies and strategies from this section.

Neighborhoods

The term *neighborhood* refers to the idea of a compact, walkable, diverse, and connected community. As the building blocks of City urban fabric, neighborhoods should be organized around small scale activity centers that provide civic and commercial functions within a five to ten minute walk for residents to meet their daily needs.

In this plan neighborhoods include mixed-use residential, downtown residential, and suburban residential future land use categories. Goals and policies listed for neighborhoods apply to all of these categories. Specific policy guidance is also provided for each category.

Connecting Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods should be well connected internally and externally for bicyclists, pedestrians, and commuters.

Small blocks and high connectivity ratios should be established and maintained both within and between neighborhoods. In redevelopment and all new neighborhood development:

- Prohibit dead ends and cul-de-sacs unless barriers or topography preclude a throughway
- Encourage blocks shorter than 600 feet from intersection to intersection and encourage frequent pedestrian connections
- Provide off-street pedestrian and bicycle routes
- Encourage sidewalks on both sides of all new neighborhood streets with street trees planted between the sidewalk and curb

Neighborhood streets should be designed to slow down traffic by decreasing street pavement widths, providing short blocks, encouraging on-street parking, planting street trees, and constructing bulb-outs and tight curb return radii of between 5 and 15 feet at intersections.

Making Places

New neighborhoods enhance the quality of life of and expand choices for the residents who live there and represent the vibrancy and diversity of Graham.

The public realm should be enhanced within all new neighborhood development and redevelopment utilizing the following techniques:

- Locate buildings near the front of the property line, orient them toward the street, and include front porches and other private outdoor spaces
- Consider view corridors of natural features and landmarks and encourage streets to terminate on a visually interesting feature
- Recess garages behind the front of buildings to avoid streetscapes dominated by garage doors
- Incorporate alleys into new neighborhoods to decrease the need for driveways and to provide for accessory buildings, utilities, and services, and parking off of neighborhood streets

Greening our Neighborhoods

Homes ideally should be located no more than a half mile from parks and ideally one quarter mile or less. The following techniques should be considered in new development:

- Locate parks in the center of new neighborhoods and establish them as a central activity point
- Encourage building frontages to face toward neighborhood parks in order to enhance safety and creation of an outdoor room
- Encourage neighborhood pocket parks of ¼ acre

Mixed Use Residential

Mixed Use residential areas in Graham ideally are located between mixed use commercial areas and single family housing neighborhoods. They should include a variety of uses, but are primarily compact residential neighborhoods.

Principal uses: detached single family housing on small lots less than 6,000 square feet in area, group homes, and live-work units

Secondary uses: multifamily housing, duplexes, townhomes, neighborhood commercial, non-retail uses such as day care, parks, schools, small civic facilities, offices and flex space, studios, bed-and-breakfasts; secondary uses are most appropriate when located at or near street intersections.

Desired Pattern

Mixed use residential neighborhoods should include diverse housing options. Housing should be built at a human scale, with buildings that reflect Graham's historic architecture and which create a comfortable space along the street.

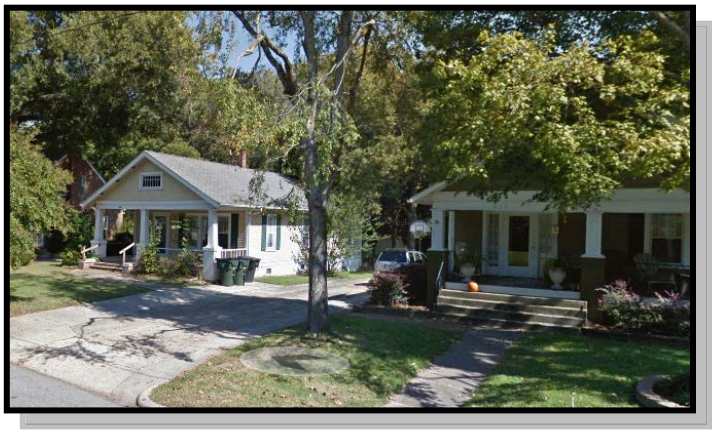
Transportation

Automobile parking should be located on the street, and behind homes with ingress and egress via rear alleys. All new street development should include wide sidewalks on both sides with street trees placed at 30-40 foot intervals. Where possible, blocks should be broken up to create street lengths of less than 600 feet between intersections. Textured crosswalks and other traffic-calming facilities should be used to increase the safety and visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Appropriate Form	2-5 story building heights
Appropriate Dimensional Standards	0-15 foot front build-to line; No minimum side yard setbacks; 16 foot minimum lot width and 50 foot maximum lot width

Downtown Residential

Downtown residential areas are located in and around the City's historic downtown area. These neighborhoods are compact, connected, and diverse.



Principal Uses: Predominantly detached single-family homes; new neighborhoods may include duplexes

Supporting Uses: Places of worship, daycares, park facilities, schools, civic spaces; designated neighborhood centers may include neighborhood-oriented commercial, small professional offices, live-work units, and home occupations provided they do not generate excessive traffic and parking

Desired Pattern

Many of Graham's downtown residential neighborhoods include sidewalks, tree coverage, small and medium-sized lots, a variety of housing choices, human-scale buildings oriented toward the public realm, attractive architectural features, and porches and stoops that facilitate social interaction and provide eyes on the street. This pattern should be maintained and continued with policies that promote home rehabilitation and context-sensitive infill development.

Transportation

It is desirable that automobile parking be located on the street, and in garages set back from the front of the home. Where public right-of-way widths permit, street reconstruction projects should include sidewalks on both sides of the street. Street trees should be planted at 30-40 foot intervals between the curb and the sidewalk. Textured crosswalks and other traffic-calming facilities will increase the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Appropriate Density	3-6 dwelling units per acre
Appropriate Dimensional Standards	New homes should consider adjacent lot sizes and building orientations

Suburban Residential

The suburban residential land use area is an important category in this plan because it makes up more area within Graham's planning area than any other future land use category. Conventional residential practices tend to result in disconnected, homogenous, automobile-oriented developments. This plan changes the paradigm by promoting diverse, walkable, and connected neighborhoods. Suburban residential neighborhoods are primarily settings for existing and future single family detached housing, but may also contain additional housing typologies and low-impact supporting uses in neighborhood activity centers. Affordable detached homes within attractive walkable neighborhoods will continue to make Graham an attractive place to live for people who work in Graham and surrounding communities.

Principal Uses: Predominantly detached single-family homes; new neighborhoods may include a range of duplexes, townhomes, and small scale multi-family dwellings of twelve units or less

Supporting Uses: Places of worship, day cares, park facilities, schools, civic spaces, and consideration of accessory dwelling units, provided they are designed to maintain the single-family character of neighborhoods. Designated neighborhood centers may include neighborhood-oriented commercial, small professional offices, live-work units, and home occupations provided they do not generate excessive traffic and parking

Desired Pattern

Recent residential developments in Graham have resulted in disconnected, low density, automobile-oriented patterns. Many new neighborhoods lack pedestrian connectivity. Many new homes are built with garages in the front of the house and wide impermeable driveways. While the automobile will continue to be the primary mode of transportation for people living in this area, neighborhoods should include pedestrian-friendly design, with a diverse array of housing built around neighborhood centers. In new neighborhoods, it would be desirable for garages to be set back from the front of the home, or accessed via a rear alley.

Transportation

It is desirable that automobile parking be located on the street, and behind homes with ingress and egress via rear alleys, and that street rights-of-way include sidewalks on both sides with street trees placed at 30-40 foot intervals within grass swales. Where possible, blocks should be broken up to create street lengths of less than 600 feet between intersections.

It is desirable that new neighborhoods connect to future and existing neighborhoods. Neighborhood streets should function as yield streets to calm traffic and decrease impermeable surface. Where determined to be unnecessary and where swales are present, curb and gutter should be discouraged to decrease development and maintenance costs and facilitate stormwater runoff.

Appropriate Density	3-6 dwelling units per acre
Appropriate Dimensional Standards	New neighborhoods should consider a variety of lot sizes with consistent setbacks along the same street

Districts

Districts include multiple buildings with a diversity of uses arranged in a form conducive to the primary function of the district. They may have centralized ownership or a regulating masterplan or small area plan, and serve a unique function within the City and region.

In this plan districts include the downtown district, mixed-use commercial districts, the education district, the employment district, and industrial districts. In some cases, such as downtown and some of the industrial districts, future land uses are already well defined by current land uses. In other cases, like the employment district, the district characteristics may not currently be present and planning and market forces will play a major role in shaping the area over the coming decades. Achieving efficient, orderly, and attractive development within some districts will be more easily achieved through the development and implementation of small area regulating plans.

Circulation and Access

Districts will be designed to accommodate all modes of travel including bicycling, walking, and driving.

It is encouraged that new streets and street redevelopment should be designed to accommodate bicyclists, pedestrians, and automobiles, unless within industrial areas where heavy freight is expected; and that pedestrian access be enhanced through the following practices:

- Incorporate street trees into sidewalk design
- Include street furniture, pedestrian scale lighting, and bulb-outs at pedestrian crossings
- Apply road diets that allows additional space for separated bicycle lanes

It is desirable that, with the exception of industrial areas, districts be connected to residential neighborhoods via arterial roads, local streets, and bicycle and pedestrian greenways. Superblocks with perimeters in excess of 2,400 feet should be avoided. Where adjacent neighborhoods worry about cut-through traffic, consider one-way streets as a temporary solution.

It is desirable that parking be provided as parallel or diagonal on-street parking, and that off-street parking be shared and located behind buildings or beside buildings with planting buffers. It is encouraged that the amount of surface parking be minimized to the extent possible.

Concentrated mix of uses

Districts feature a mix of uses and an attractive and inviting public realm that emphasizes the district's unique identity.

Uses in districts, with the exception of industrial districts, should be organized to promote multimodal transportation access and viability and support future transit stops

Buildings in districts, with the exception of industrial districts, should contribute to a cohesive urban fabric that promotes walking and biking viability through the following practices:

- Orient buildings toward plazas, parks, and streets
- Minimize building setbacks from public streets
- Encourage parking in the rear of commercial and residential buildings

The design of large retail buildings shall be consistent with Graham's historic architecture. Large retail buildings should incorporate low impact development design, provide pedestrian and bicycle access, and hide parking with street trees and other landscaping.

Downtown District

A vibrant downtown is critical for the success of any City. The urban fabric of downtown Graham exhibits many of the characteristics of successful places: Buildings located up to the

front of the lot, wide sidewalks, on-street parking, awnings, transparent doors and windows, vertical mixed-use buildings, terminated vistas, and small blocks all make downtown a vibrant and charming pedestrian-friendly environment. This design was no accident; it was and continues to be the most efficient way of building a City for people moving around on foot and using public transportation.

The downtown district should foster vibrant activity day and night by including diversity in land use, including offices, homes, restaurants, entertainment venues, high quality public gathering spaces, and cultural opportunities. In this way, downtown Graham will be the focal point of the community.

Desired Pattern

New buildings in downtown should be located no further than 10 feet from the front lot line and should include transparent windows on at least 50% of the first floor facade. Multiple stories and a mix of uses are desirable. The building design should also consider the existing historic architecture throughout downtown.

Transportation

Downtown streets should be built as places, not just transportation corridors, and should primarily accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists. Automobile parking should be located on the street, creating a barrier between moving traffic and the sidewalk, and behind or below buildings. Bicycle racks should be located throughout downtown. In all new street redevelopment projects, street trees should be placed at 20-30 foot intervals.

Mixed Use Commercial

Mixed use commercial areas include commercial and office developments primarily located at major intersections. These areas provide a mix of retail, commercial, office, multifamily residential and institutional uses. Buildings are multiple stories, with architectural details, surface textures, and modulation of light and shade, and should be built at a human scale.

Currently, several large commercial buildings exist within the mixed use commercial future land use category. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, “Big-box stores impose hidden costs that don’t appear on the price tags of the products they sell: traffic congestion; loss of trees, open space and farmland; displaced small businesses; substitution of jobs that support families with low-paying jobs that don’t; air and water pollution; dying downtowns with vacant buildings; abandoned shopping centers; and a degraded sense of community.” In some cases, the development of large retail buildings can cost communities in opportunity costs, and long-term costs associated with additional road maintenance and service provision. Graham will consider the full impacts from large retail development proposals and recommend sustainable alternatives.

Desired Pattern

Mixed use commercial land use areas currently include many strip and other low density commercial developments. These should be redeveloped over time into pedestrian-oriented nodal centers of activity. New buildings in mixed use commercial areas should be located no further than 15 feet from the front lot line and should include transparent windows on at least 50% of the first floor facade. Multiple stories and a mix of uses are desirable.

Appropriate Form	3-5 story building heights

Transportation

Automobile parking should be located on the street, creating a barrier between moving traffic and the sidewalk, and behind buildings. Bicycle racks should be located in front of all new buildings and all new street redevelopment should include 8-15 foot wide sidewalks with street trees placed at 30 foot intervals. Where possible, blocks should be broken up to create street lengths of less than 600 feet between intersections. Alleys are also highly encouraged in order to reduce curb cuts and remove utilities and trash from the front of buildings.

Appropriate Form	2-5 story buildings

Education District

The education district currently includes the campus of Alamance Community College. This area represents a significant opportunity to partner with private sector companies to train workers for local jobs located in Graham and the NCCP. Most students commute to ACC via automobile and therefore surface parking lots currently make up a large percentage of the campus's ground cover.

This district is located adjacent to the Haw River, providing the site with a major visual and environmental asset and necessitating implementation of low impact development. The City should work with Alamance Community College and other stakeholders to develop a small area plan consistent with the goals and policies of this plan.

Desired Pattern

Over time, the education district should be planned to include compact development patterns. Such development should consist of mixed use buildings that include housing for students, staff, and instructors, commercial uses for daily needs, flex space, and other space for light industry and employment. Parking structures should be placed on the periphery of the campus and behind buildings to allow for centralized green spaces. Buildings within this district should be threaded into a walkable urban fabric.

Transportation

Automobile parking should be located on the street, behind buildings, and in parking garages. Bicycle racks should be located in front of all new buildings. Off-street bicycle and pedestrian and facilities should connect the campus to surrounding neighborhoods, as well as connect to the Haw River Trail and other greenways throughout the City.

Appropriate Form	2-6 story buildings

Employment District

The employment district is a joint land use area between Mebane, Graham, and Alamance County. It currently contains several uses, including farms, single family homes, natural groundcover, and warehousing.

Desired Pattern

The employment district should be studied and planned in order to accommodate a range of employers and provide office space, industrial space, commercial space, institutional space, and residential housing. This should be planned to limit environmental impacts, preserve open space and open corridors, and develop high-quality and adaptable buildings for a variety of companies.

Transportation

The employment district should support the viability of safe walking and bicycling as a serious form of transportation, while also ensuring the most efficient transportation network possible for freight trucks and other heavy vehicles that require regional access.

Appropriate Density	6 dwelling units per acre; 0.5 Commercial/Industrial FAR

Industrial

Industrial districts contain large one and two story buildings with easy access to the major roads like state highways and Interstate 40/85 for heavy freight vehicles. Some of these uses may be considered noxious and therefore adequate buffers must exist between industrial uses and other land uses, as well as natural areas. Graham's wastewater treatment plant is also located in an industrial area.

Desired Pattern

Industrial districts should have limited setbacks between the front of the property line and between adjacent industrial uses in order to use land and infrastructure efficiently. These uses should be heavily buffered from residential neighborhoods, parks and open space, and streams. Such areas should follow orderly development patterns and seek to maintain minimal adverse environmental impacts.

Transportation

Transportation infrastructure in this district should primarily accommodate heavy freight vehicles by providing wide lanes with shoulders. Freight routes should avoid pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods. Intersections along freight routes should maintain appropriate curb radii to accommodate large vehicles.

Appropriate Density	0.3-0.5 Commercial/Industrial FAR

Corridors

Corridors serve as connections between important places and along highly trafficked roads. But in this plan corridors do not simply plan for street maintenance. Instead corridors represent a network of travel routes, increase choices for people to move throughout the City, reducing automobile dependency, providing a link to parks and open space, and overall enhancing travel within Graham.

In this plan, corridors include designated commercial corridors as a future land use category, as well as the southern loop road proposed by NCDOT, and paths designating enhanced bicycle and pedestrian routes.

Commercial Corridor

Two commercial corridors within Graham include spans along NC-54 and NC-87 where single family residential uses are being replaced with automobile-oriented commercial uses. The commercial corridor land use exists in order to acknowledge this slow and incremental yet persistent land use transition, and address the challenges posed by this growth pattern.

Desired Pattern

Ideally, most future development will be focused in strategically located clusters identified within this plan. Where commercial growth occurs along the identified NC 54 and NC 87 corridors, pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular safety should be promoted through high quality planned development.

Transportation

These corridors currently comprise extremely long blocks and very few intersections, which result in low connectivity and can be detrimental to adjacent neighborhoods. While limited access roads may be beneficial for high-speed mobility in rural areas, this plan acknowledges that as Graham continues to grow and expand along these corridors, new intersections should be developed. Intersections should be spaced at no more than 1000 feet and preferably less than 800 feet in order to improve access to future development and increase connectivity along these corridors. Additional rights-of-way and pedestrian easements should be obtained through property acquisition and landowner dedication at the development and redevelopment stage.

Driveway curb cuts at each commercial business and residential home increase the likelihood of collisions. To reduce this risk, and improve the aesthetic quality and accessibility of commercial businesses, rear alley access, divided slip lanes, and mid-block shared parking should be provided along the commercial corridor.

Appropriate Density	6 dwelling units per acre; 0.5 Commercial/Industrial FAR

Edges

Edges serve a critical function as boundaries of the built environment. Edges protect the bucolic nature of rural areas and forests as well as provide buffers between the built environment and waterways. In this plan, edges include the rural residential future land use category and stream floodway.

Rural Residential

The rural residential area includes low density housing, farms, and undeveloped natural areas including streams and mixed oak-pine forests, in areas not served by City water and sewer services

Desired Pattern

For the planning horizon of this plan, rural residential areas should maintain their existing rural and low-density residential character. In order to do this the City will avoid extending water and wastewater lines to properties located within this future land use area for the near and medium-term future.

Transportation

Roads in rural residential areas should limit their impact on the environment by limiting encroachment into sensitive environmental areas and reducing impermeable surface area. Acquisition of land and easements should be considered for trails, especially along streams, and for protection of riparian buffers.

Encouraged Zoning Districts	Adopt a new rural zoning district
Appropriate Density	2 Acres per dwelling unit

Floodways

The designated floodway areas on the Future Land Use Map include trees and natural cover that buffer streams from the built environment, provide space for trails and recreation, support habitats, and reduce flood hazards. This area should contain no development.

Boundaries

Boundaries on the Future Land Use Map show the existing border of the City of Graham, the City's extra-territorial jurisdiction boundary, and the planning area.

Orderly Growth

Graham will use its influence to maintain the existing character of rural areas on the City's southern periphery, as well as to slow outward growth and direct inward growth.

The City's influence should be extended to the future planning area boundary identified by the Future Land Use Map. Land that falls within Graham's expanded Extraterritorial Jurisdiction to the City's south should be within a rural zoning category.

Centers

Regional nodes and activity centers are mixed use districts of commercial, entertainment, civic, and residential concentrations that center on a focal point, typically at a crossroads of major corridors. These regional nodes vary in geographic area, building sizes and scales, and service area, but all maintain walkable and multimodal characteristics with activity on the street and sidewalk and in public spaces like parks, squares, and plazas.

Because they are such important places within the City, centers should also be aesthetically pleasing and care should be taken to provide attractive signage, plant trees along the edge of streets, use high quality building materials, and hide utilities and electrical wires in rear alleys or underground.

Downtown Regional Node

The downtown regional node serves as Graham's primary center of commercial and civic activity and serves populations beyond the extent of the planning area.

Interchange Regional Node

Interchange regional nodes, like the downtown regional node, serves a market within and beyond the extent of Graham's planning area.

Community Activity Center

Community activity centers generally serve, not just the surrounding residential areas, but also populations living within the Graham and neighborhoods within a three to five mile radius. These centers should be pedestrian-oriented in character and may include a vertical mix of uses including neighborhood-oriented commercial such as small grocery stores, dry cleaners, coffee shops, small restaurants, small professional offices and live-work units.

Buildings should be located along the sidewalk, face the street, reflect the architecture of the surrounding neighborhood, and range in height from one to three stories. Off-street parking should be shared and located behind buildings or beside buildings with planting buffers.

Neighborhood Activity Center

Neighborhood activity centers are located within residential areas and serve the neighborhood, especially homes within a ¼ mile to 1 mile radius. These centers should be pedestrian-oriented in character and may include a vertical mix of uses including neighborhood-oriented commercial such as small grocery stores, dry cleaners, coffee shops, small restaurants, small professional offices and live-work units.

Buildings should be located along the sidewalk, face the street, reflect the architecture of the surrounding neighborhood, and range in height from one to three stories. Off-street parking should be shared and located behind buildings.

Potential Activity Center

The plan designates potential activity centers, which are major intersections that do not currently contain significant commercial activity but that may change in character over the coming years.

PART IV: IMPLEMENTATION

Action Plan

Introduction

The policies and initiatives identified in the plan will be made real only through concerted, consistent, and highly focused attention to implementation. City administration, present and future City Councils, and other governmental entities will actively and continuously use the Comprehensive Plan as a key reference for all decisions and actions.

A strategic plan of action is needed to achieve the goals discussed in this plan. The Action Plan provided here summarizes the strategies discussed in previous sections, and designates priorities for implementation.

Priorities outlined in the following Action Plan include the following:

- **Near-Term Priority** initiatives should be initiated upon adoption of the Plan and should be well underway within two years of Plan adoption.

- **Mid-Term Priority** initiatives should be considered for implementation as soon as resources and opportunities become available.

- **Long-Term Priority** initiatives should be kept on the list of desirable outcomes, and considered as opportunities emerge and/or following success in implementing near and mid-term priority items.

The full listing of strategies included in this Plan follows, along with priority designations.

Following is a summary of the actions recommended in this Graham 2035 Comprehensive Plan, with designations of priorities for implementation.

Strategy	**Priority**
Strategy 1.1.5: Discourage Strip Development Discourage highway strip development along transportation arteries and proposed interstate interchanges by directing these commercial activities to proposed activity centers.	Near-Term
Strategy 1.2.1: Historic District Consider designating the North Main Street National Historic District as a local historic district.	Near-Term
Strategy 1.3.1: Small Area Plans Prepare Small Area Plans for Downtown and for development/redevelopment of the North Main Street historic area.	Near-Term
Strategy 2.1.5: Reduce Barriers Work with local businesses and economic development partners to identify and address unnecessary barriers to local business development.	Near-Term
Strategy 2.2.1: Job Development Provide support and assistance to the business recruitment efforts of the Alamance County Chamber of Commerce, seeking to attract a range of employment opportunities.	Near-Term
Strategy 2.3.2: Prepare Development Strategies for Interchange Areas Prepare and implement strategies to promote business development around the City's three interstate interchanges.	Near-Term
Strategy 2.4.1: NC Commerce Park Develop a plan for the employment district in order to maximize economic growth within this area. Align plans and investments with efforts to recruit and grow strategic business opportunities in the NCCP.	Near-Term

Strategy	**Priority**
Strategy 2.4.2: Promote Industrial Redevelopment Encourage reinvestment and intensification at existing industrial sites. Encourage redevelopment of existing buildings and infrastructure for industrial growth.	Near-Term
Strategy 3.1.1: Parking Space Standards Adjust parking space regulations to encourage parking strategies that avoid the overdevelopment of parking.	Near-Term
Strategy 3.3.1: Sidewalks and Street Trees Amend subdivision and zoning regulations to encourage all new development to include street trees, especially where part of the adopted Pedestrian Plan.	Near-Term
Strategy 4.1.1: Increase Community Involvement in Schools Initiate a local effort to increase community involvement in Graham's public schools, through parent outreach, increased resources for after-school programs, mentoring, and support for teachers and facilities.	Near-Term
Strategy 4.1.2: Establish Communications and Coordination Mechanisms with the Alamance-Burlington School System. Work with the elected and administrative leadership of the County School System to identify additional opportunities for information-sharing and collaboration in support of facilities and student/family needs.	Near-Term
Strategy 4.3.5: Adjust Land Use Regulations Amend zoning regulations to create a new Rural zone, and work with Alamance County to expand Graham's Extraterritorial Jurisdiction to align with expected development patterns.	Near-Term
Strategy 1.1.2: Design Guidelines Develop commercial and residential site design guidelines that enhance community character and appearance, to be used with special use permit and conditional rezoning applications.	Mid-Term

Strategy	**Priority**
Strategy 1.3.3: East Harden Prepare a corridor plan to guide development and public investment in the East Harden/NC54 corridor.	Mid-Term
Strategy 2.1.1: Business Incubation Develop a business incubation program to encourage development of new business ventures.	Mid-Term
Strategy 2.3.1: Facilitate focused development Incentivize pedestrian-oriented nodal development consistent with this plan by incentivizing smart growth development. The City could choose to utilize some of the following methods: • Expedited permit review • Deferred tax payments • Covering some building expenses • Low-interest loans • Providing infrastructure • Flexible and innovative regulations • Small area plans	Mid-Term
Strategy 2.4.3: Freight Corridors Encourage freight-oriented industrial development to locate where it can maximize access to major freight routes, including I-40/85 and state highways.	Mid-Term
Strategy 4.2.1: Greenways Continue to develop a greenway system that links together the City's recreational resources.	Mid-Term
Strategy 4.2.3: Continue to develop Graham's new City Park. Continue efforts to develop the future City of Graham Recreation Complex.	Mid-Term
Strategy 4.3.1: Land Use Patterns Promote development of efficient land use patterns to allow continued quality and efficiency of water systems. Discourage the extension of water service into areas that are not most suitable for development.	Mid-Term

Strategy	**Priority**
Strategy 4.3.2: Conserve Water Resources Through education, outreach, infrastructure, and service pricing, promote the conservation of water resources for long term security.	Mid-Term
Strategy 4.3.3: Increase Use of Reclaimed Water Promote the use of reclaimed water by incentivizing rainwater collection and other forms of reclaiming water.	Mid-Term
Strategy 4.3.4: Water Efficient Construction Incorporate water saving and water efficient construction incentives into appropriate development regulations.	Mid-Term
Strategy 5.2.2: Stock of affordable housing Preserve and increase the stock of long term and permanent affordable housing to meet the needs of the community that are not met by private market conditions. Coordinate planning efforts with housing developers and non-profits organizations.	Mid-Term
Strategy 6.1.1: Water Quality BMPs Use non-structural best management practices (BMPs) to improve water quality, such as public education program and monitoring and control of illicit discharges.	Mid-Term
Strategy 1.1.1: Wayfinding and Gateways Develop an upgraded "wayfinding" and signage system for installation along gateways and corridors. Designate gateways for entrances to the historic downtown area, and further develop plans for public improvements and landscaping in the gateway areas.	Long-Term
Strategy 1.1.3: Tree Planting Develop Expand public and private tree planting initiatives in appropriate locations.	Long-Term
Strategy 1.1.4: Underground Utilities Encourage the Placement of utility wires underground, especially in the downtown area.	Long-Term

Strategy	**Priority**
Strategy 2.1.2: Collaborate with regional networks Utilize resources available through UNC Chapel Hill and other state government authorities and non-profits to develop and evaluate economic development programs.	Long-Term
Strategy 2.1.6: Business opportunity information Provide a clearinghouse for information on locating a business in Graham and the available State and local resources available to small business, including funding, training, grants, and location assistance.	Long-Term
Strategy 2.4.4: Green Industry Growth Encourage improvements to the cleanliness, safety, and ecological performance of industrial development and freight corridors by facilitating adoption of new technology and design, conserving trees on industrial properties, and use of renewable energy sources.	Long-Term
Strategy 2.4.5: Attract Green Industry Work to attract environmentally responsible companies and foster growth in green industries in Graham.	Long-Term
Strategy 3.2.3: InterCity Bikeway System Partner with Burlington, Mebane, and the MPO to develop an intercity bikeway system, preferably including off-street bike paths and greenways.	Long-Term
Strategy 3.2.5: Future Transit Options Consider coordinating within the region to implement a transit system for citizens to access the governmental offices located in downtown Graham, and increase accessibility to Alamance Community College.	Long-Term
Strategy 3.3.2: Increase Bicycle Parking Amend zoning regulations to encourage and provide incentives for installation of bicycle parking for new development.	Long-Term
Strategy 3.4.1: Accommodating Street Design Design to accommodate pedestrians by providing wide sidewalks, shade, bicycle parking, and safe access to and from the stop.	Long-Term

Strategy	**Priority**
Strategy 4.4.1: Study Need for New Facility Initiate a study of the need and potential location for a new fire station in Graham, based on the City's Future Land Use Plan.	Long-Term
Strategy 5.2.1: Physically-accessible housing Ensure pedestrian-oriented housing designs with access to nearby services.	Long-Term
Strategy 6.1.2: Low Impact Development Promote the use of Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to mitigate the impacts of stormwater runoff. Such techniques should include the use of green roofs, rain gardens, cisterns, and rain barrels, as well as reducing impermeable surfaces and restricting unnecessary grading and clearing of natural vegetation.	Long-Term
Strategy 6.1.3: Wastewater Reuse Encourage reuse of treated wastewater at Graham's wastewater treatment plant to further reduce the nitrogen and phosphorous load to the Haw River and reduce non-potable water consumption where feasible.	Long-Term

GLOSSARY OF PLAN TERMS

Below is a list of urban planning terms that are used within the Plan, their respective definitions, and relevant links to websites.

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Excellence)

Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) in 1998, LEED provides a suite of development standards for environmentally sustainable construction. LEED is also a certification that development professionals can acquire that identifies their environmentally sustainable construction expertise.
http://www.usgbc.org

Low Impact Development (LID)

Low impact development is a term that has come to describe best management practices for stormwater runoff management through on-site design, such as a rain garden. This contrasts with traditional stormwater techniques that divert water off a development site and into a traditional stormwater system.

Mixed-Use Development

A building or development that incorporates two or more different uses such as, but not limited to, residential, office, retail, public, or entertainment. Vertical mixed-use developments incorporate a mix of uses within the same building, typically with different uses on different floors. Horizontal mixed-use developments incorporate a mix of different uses within different buildings in a common development.

Pedestrian-Friendly / Pedestrian-Oriented Development / Walkable Development

Pedestrian-friendly developments are designed with an emphasis primarily on the sidewalk and on pedestrian access to the site and building, rather than auto access and parking areas.

Sustainability / Sustainable Development

Sustainability describes the concept of a community meeting the needs of the present population while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities. The sustainability concept traditionally incorporates economic, social, and environmental themes and can be used as a way of guiding development policy within a community.